PS 3503
.U25 M3
1915

Woodrow Wilson, Esq.

READ THE GREAT WAR STORY

THE MAN WITH A COUNTRY

LOUIS H. BUCKSHORN

ELFI PRESS. WESTFORD, MASS.

PRICE, TEN CENTS

151

Copyright by
LOUIS H. BUCKSHORN
1915

Right of translation into foreign languages, including Scandinavian reserved.
Dramatization, including film production reserved.

By transfer
The White House.

PS3503
.W25M3
1915

THE MAN WITH A COUNTRY

Yetli owned five acres of land. It was choice land. But not in the sense of its having been a matter of choice by purchase. No, the land had been in the family for generations. The title ran back to a Yetli in feudal times when Saronyi was overlord of the whole valley. Yes, even beyond Saronyi's overlordship, there had been a Yetli on the land.

But it was choice in the sense that it yielded plentifully for Yetli's family—a family that was all under one roof. The goats were in the back part, while his family lived in the front part close by the road, just this side of the brook.

The land was also choice in the sense of Yetli's good use of it, that is, there was always a considerable bit left over with the new harvest already in sight. And Yetli was generous to both sides of what dwelt beneath his thatch.

In Yetli's heart there was a deep love for it all. Generations had bred it in the bone. But it was not a stupid, clod-like attachment.

He tilled his land as if every spring were a miracle; and every harvest, a visit of the angels. He fed his hay and grain not just because it paid in milk and cheese returns. That he knew. He fed it from an additional feeling of comradeship with his flocks.

As to his family? It was a love surpassing the love of land and the love of flocks. And it was returned more than a thousand-fold by Yetta, his wife, and Heidi, the lad,—the jewel of Yetli's soul.

And when had a Yetli ever failed in loyalty to his country? Above and beyond the king was what the king stood for—God and country. Had it not been Yetli, generally so silent-mouthed and scanty of word, who last week had rebuked the treasonable speech of his neighbor Franzl? Franzl, who held the love of country in such low esteem as to say there might be times when it was better to be alive for one's country than to be dead for it. But Franzl, while a splendid neighbor, had always been loose-jointed on military matters.

The heated talk with Franzl had grown out of the mobilization of the army by the king. Two days later came the order to Yetli and other village reservists to join the colors. Franzl was among them.

Every country was arming—getting ready to gun. East, west, north and south. All were mutually prepared. It was that which would make war impossible.

Now all countries were all entering the war. Just why, no one could tell. Yetli couldn't.

"Land hunger," said Yetli's king as he opened his military jaws to take a bite. And thousands of his subjects repeated the words "for king and country."

In the kingdom to the south of Yetli's country, they were doing likewise. They were all being made ready to gun. Why, no one could tell. "Land hungry," said the king, and smacked his military lips. "We must annex more land," repeated the people.

* * * * *

MORNING.

The forces from the north swept into the kingdom of the south. Yetli and Franzl in the same regiment. First it was a joy ride. Then it changed as the lust of blood awoke.

"They are not of us," spoke Yetli and his invading countrymen. More like a whisper, said softly to themselves. Then they began to shout it. When the full lust of blood swept through their veins, they wrote it with their bloody bayonet points on the white breasts of women and children. "For king and country," shouted the invading hosts.

Then the invading tide turned. The hosts from the north were driven back, back, from trench to trench, from field to field, until they were pushed across their own border.

Still the tide of pushed and pusher rolled on and on. Sometimes in high waves, like a storm-driven sea; then in ripples, like a breeze that moved gently over the face of the waters. But whether in high waves or in ripples, it was always a movement of destruction and death,—to man, to beast, to land.

Yetli's work in the retreat had been with the rear guard—to harass, to check and destroy. He was aware that they were within his country's borders. And that the advance guard of the army must be somewhere near his village.

For two days the army forces with which Yetli worked had stubbornly held their ground. They had been reinforced twice, as the advance needed time to entrench itself. Then the order came to fall back. For two days they fell back. On the night of the second day they came up with the main army now in trenches.

On the same night the invading hosts from the south had wormed their way into underground burrows in front of the entrenched forces of the north.

Daylight opened with a violent cannonade from Yetli's army. Then they charged. Part of Yetli's regiment led. On, on, nearer and nearer.

Then there came a thousand spitting flashes from the enemy's trenches. A thousand leaden slugs pinged their way in a high-pitched child's soprano into the bodies of the oncoming men.

Some stumbled.

Some leaped.

Some pitched headlong as if diving into water.

Some twisted in a corkscrew movement straight into the air.

Some sat down and spat a red stream from their mouths.

A few reached the enemy's trenches.

None returned.

At six o'clock the enemy opened with his field pieces eighteen miles back of his own trenches. At nine his infantry made a dash. Nearer and nearer they came. They reached the barbed wire entanglements. The advanced men laid their cutters to the wire.

As they did so, blue balls of electricity rolled along the wires. There was a smell of burnt flesh in the air. Men lurched to the ground. Others took their places. Again the blue balls ran along the barbed wire. And again, the men lurched in their unstrapped electrocution.

From the trenches the rifles spat their leaden flow. One man tried to brush a fly that stung him on the cheek. It was not an insect. It was death. Death for all.

* * * * *

High Noon.

Both sides rested. It was high noon. Over in the open field, midway between foe and friend, some one sat up. He was about sixty feet from a brook that ran through the field. It was Yetli.

He was trying to pull his wits together. Why should the fellow whisper so hoarsely? Why didn't he speak right out? Again he listened:

"Water, for God's sake, water," came in a hoarse whisper.

Just then something dripped from the tip of Yetli's nose. He put his hand up to his nose. It felt smeary and sticky. Yetli looked at his fingers.

Then he noticed that it was too dark to see.

Simple enough. He had been stunned in the charge, and lay there for dead during the day. Now the night had set in. Of course he couldn't see.

But he felt a dazzling sense of heat and light that was at strange odds with his conclusions. He struck a match.

He could hear the little puff. The flames burned his fingers. But it remained dark. "Fool, the match was wet," he said to himself. Then

he tried another, and held it at the extreme end. Slowly he could feel the heat of the flame as it crawled up the little wooden stick. Then it burned his fingers. It came to him.

Yetli was blind. The shot that had shattered the bridge of his nose had carried his eyes with it. The smeary stuff on his nose was clotted blood. But he felt no concern.

Again the hoarse whisper came to him:—

"Water, for God's sake, water!"

Yetli listened intently. Not to what was asked for, but to the man's tongue.

"Water, for God's sake, water!"

The speech that was spoken belonged to the enemy! Yetli felt around his belt.

But not for his canteen. Then he groped on the ground around him. The man had watched him closely.

"There's a helmet—to th' right," came in a choking whisper.

At that Yetli stopped groping. Through his mind had flashed the question: "What if he has seen that you are blind? He may be directing you so that he can get you where he can kill you."

Yetli sat up.

"Water, water, water."

Yetli didn't know what to say. So he said, "There is no water."

"Back of you—a little distance back of you."

Yetli turned around. A strange sensation had come over him. As men are able to tell localities by the piping of the wind over the lay of the land, so Yetli listened to the flow of the water in the brook. It sang the same water song to which he had listened as a child, as a youth, as a lover, as a husband, as a father.

He knew the water song of the brook from every angle of his "Five Acres." He was on his own home land. The brook had flashed it to his ear.

Then he turned toward the voice that had asked for water:

"To the left of you, in the direction of three poplars, is there a house, close by the road?" inquired Yetli.

Groans reached Yetli's ear as if some one were turning in great agony.

"I see three stumps of trees. There is no house. Some charred beams are sticking out of a cellar hole."

A great hate surged up in Yetli's bosom. It would have made no difference to him even had he known that his own general had razed his house to the ground. It stood in the way of a good defensive.

"Water, for God's sake, water!"

"I'll water you," shouted Yetli in the border speech that was common to both men.

The man smiled. He knew not the thought that lay behind. He watched Yetli groping around once more. But not for the helmet in which to carry water.

"To the right, in the direction away from me," he whispered. Still Yetli groped in every direction except the one the man had called. Once he shoved his fingers in to what seemed a queer little hole. It had sharp edges on the lower and upper side. Inside it felt soft. When he felt the tongue, he knew his fingers were in a dead man's open mouth. Still he groped on.

Then he rested. His strength was giving out.

"There is another helmet. Just to your right."

Yetli was startled. The voice was within what seemed less than three feet from him. He put out his right hand mechanically. Something turned over, but he couldn't grasp it. He tried again, and again the thing turned over. Then he put out his left hand, and he picked it up.

It was a heavy helmet that would hold water. It also had a heavy brass spike on the crown.

"The brook—water, water," whispered the man.

Yetli's back was to the brook. In his left hand he was putting the helmet with spike down. One could strike a fearful blow so.

"The brook," urged the man.

Yetli listened a moment. The brook was singing its water song. There were no notes of strife or hatred in it. Just pure, sweet life—for man, for flocks, for land. Purling o'er pebbles, dashing o'er rocks, wherever it came, whatever it touched, it brought growth and life.

Yetli was back in the song on the Sunday when he made his first communion. His confirmation verse rippled to the surface of his memory with the cool flow of the water song. He couldn't gather the words in regular order, but it had something to do with a cup of cold water in Christ's name and then not being cast out.

Other thoughts came to him in the water song. They were related to the crown and the jewel of his household. But, in the mercy of things, he was blind.

"A drink,—water,—water," whispered the man.

Yetli's left hand let go of the front of the helmet. He grasped it by the side of the rim. He could carry more water holding it that way.

Then he worked his way slowly toward the brook, being guided by the rippling noise of the flowing water.

Once he pricked himself sharply on an upsticking bayonet. He felt to see what it was. Then he crawled on. When he reached the region of particularly rich grass, he knew he must be close to the bank. The brook's influence reached out in the rich grass by its banks—yes, and even farther after this day.

He dipped the helmet. How cool the water felt. Then he drank so that this other man might have the full of it.

Slowly he found his way back. Where the dead lay so heaped that it was impossible to get over them, he worked his way round. Always being guided by the whispered demand: "Water—water."

Once he paused. Something struck him in the back. It was the arm of a dead man who had just slid off a heap of dead. Yetli went on. Now he was almost up to the whisper. Would the man strike? He had read all sorts of things in the papers of the brutal practices by the enemy.

But he went up to the whisper.

"Rise up, here is water."

"I can't," said the whisper, "I am dead in all of me that is below my waist."

Yetli felt a great mercy coming all over him.

"In the name of Christ," he said softly to himself, and put his arm under the whisperer. Then he held the helmet with water to the man's lips. He was blind, but Yetli felt what the water was to the man.

He also felt a Presence he had not felt on any field of the war. Then he withdrew his arm from beneath the man's shoulder.

"You are blind," said the man.

"Yes," said Yetli, "since this morning."

"No," said the man. "We both have been blind all our days. It came to me when I heard the cool brook flowing so near with what I needed so much; so near to what was so free, and yet made so helpless to get. And when I saw you grope so, as if you were in dark night, it came to me: We were both blind."

"You see, don't you?" asked Yetli.

"Not until to-day, as I lay here. First I was dead up to where the bullet struck me. Then death crept up higher and higher. When it comes as high as this, I am done." He laid his hand on his heart, and rested a moment. "At first I cared much. Then I watched the flowing water. It was free. The banks held it in place. That was good. If it had not been held in place, it would have scattered itself to no good. Yet it was free within its best power. Where it went, there it brought life."

Yetli was listening to the song of the water. Only it came with a larger meaning from the lips of the stranger.

"Just so should it be with our life. Only I did not see it so clearly until I watched the flowing water. Life should run like the water from the mountains to the sea between the banks of each one's country. Wherever it touches it should bring life. Whenever it is touched, it should leave life."

He rested a moment. Yetli shoved a coat under the head of the man.

"I was taught to hate you, because our king wanted to get the land through which your country's stream of life flowed. You were taught to hate me and mine, because your king wanted the land through which our country's stream of life flowed."

Yetli's enemy paused. There came a painful gasp. His face was turning grey, but Yetli saw only by an inward light.

"God wants no more kings, comrade. While there are kings there shall be hate; and where there is hate, there shall be murder. God sent his Son to bring us land and life, life like the streams that flow from the mountains to the sea. And kings have choked it and poisoned it with hate and murder."

Then all was silent. Yetli heard only the murmuring flow of the waters. Nothing had ever been between him and the life-giving power of the stream. Why should it not be so everywhere in life—in his country—in all countries?

If only every one and every thing would see Christ as this enemy of his had seen Him. Perhaps the world might some time drink from this same stream, and the stream flow through every country.

The upper end of the figure before him moved as if in a supreme effort. Yetli could not see it, but a low whisper reached his ear. He bent over:

"With Christ—" then the rest of the words he could not make out. "Swear it," came in faint and fading whisper.

Yetli raised his hand.

"I swear it." Then he lowered his hand into that of his comrade. It was cold and lifeless, but a Presence returned Yetli's grip.

* * * * *

SUNSET.

Back of Yetli, in the foremost trench, lay that part of his regiment that had not taken part in the dash this morning. A well-concealed field glass had picked up Yetli's movements just after he had given the enemy drink. The man behind the glass was reporting Yetli's movements to the men in the first trench.

"Yetli has moved toward an enemy who seems to be alive," reported the glass.

"He pauses as if looking for a weapon," continued the glass.
"Now he bends over to strike," added the glass with relish.
"Hurrah, hurrah!" shouted Yetli's comrades.
"My God, he is shaking hands with the enemy!" shouted the glass.
"Traitor!" hissed the trenchers.
Then the glass gave out a rapid order.
"Commando, fire."
Six rifles spat their fire.
Five balls tore their way from Yetli's regiment through Yetli's body.
Franzl, one of the *six*, had shot wild.
But Franzl, in military matters, was always loose-jointed.
Yetli's body swayed a moment. Then it lunged over wildly.
It fell within a few rods of two other bodies—
That of a woman—and a tender lad.

* * * * *

NIGHT.

At dusk, with a sky dark and cloudy, it began to rain just as the trenchers from Yetli's corps were going to extend their trenches. Everybody swore, even the diggers.

It began to rain very finely, like a mist sifting down from the hills. Then it came in larger drops. It had a refreshing odor, like that of rain, but withal it had a depressing effect. Men put their sleeves to their noses, but there was no odor.

Still this rain continued.

Suddenly, from out the air, fell myriads of balls of fire, sputtering incandescent shafts of sparks onto the men in the trenches, onto the tents, the commissary, onto everything.

In an instant, a thousand flames leaped up from the trenches, from the tents, from the commissary, from everything.

Groans of human agony; leaps of frenzied men to the edge of the trenches; mad cries of shrieking horses with tails on fire that moved like rapid torches through the air; goats and kine, one moment white in a lurid light, then black and charred and swallowed up by the engulfing sea of fire.

The coup that had been hinted at so long had been made.

Tearsoline, the new, concentrated and odorless product from crude oil had been rained from above. Then incandescent fire had been shot onto the saturated land, flocks and men.

It was a complete success.

* * * * *

The day thereafter, the victors made the dead a common bed. Over the upturned faces of foe and friend, they drew the cover of the earth.

The king from the south country rode by on a proud charger. With a victor's look he glanced over the blackened and dead-bestrewn fields.

But he saw neither field nor the dead.

A smile played on his face.

"We shall annex this canton to our crown," he said, "it will give the people more land."

"Long live the king," shouted the living.

"Long live the king," came from the echo from the shallow beds and trenches of the dead.

But it was only the dead who had inherited the earth. For they had fed the land hunger of the kings, and rested in the lap of their labor.

Why not take this story home, and read it to mother and the children?

H251 78 525

JUN 73
N. MANCHESTER,
INDIANA

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 015 906 033 0